

A Letter from the President

DECEMBER 7, 2016

<http://yourstudentsunion.ca/a-letter-from-the-president/>

To the undergraduate students of Wilfrid Laurier University,

On October 20, 2016, Laurier LifeLink, a campus club that encourages dialogue about contemporary bio-ethical issues, held an event in the Quad that was intended to profile pro-life options. While this demonstration was solely to raise awareness, the visceral nature of the display interfered with the ability of some members of the Laurier community to safely attend class, travel to work or remain on campus to study. The way this issue politicizes the body, in this instance, through vocal opposition to the legislated right of abortion in Canada, perpetuated significant feelings of judgement, exclusion, and fear.

The Students' Union is committed to ensuring that your undergraduate experience takes place in a diverse and inclusive campus community. This does not suggest discussion of controversial issues should be avoided; however, having a productive debate must emphasize the importance of disagreement without condemnation. The adversarial tone of the event evoked a confrontation which eliminated the possibility of respectful dialogue and created an unsafe environment for all students. We are working in conjunction with the Graduate Students' Association, the Diversity and Equity Office, and the Office of Student Affairs to ensure this does not happen again.

Clubs offer a unique opportunity to engage in the extracurricular activities we are passionate about, while enhancing our academic experience. The Students' Union is revising several clubs policies to ensure future events, particularly those engaging in controversial or polarizing topics, respect the multitude of personal experiences and perspectives on campus. We remain dedicated to supporting the fundamental freedoms all Canadians share, including the ability to openly express opinions and beliefs. As a result of the aforementioned activities, an on-campus event form was created to ensure events are coordinated in close collaboration with the Clubs and Associations' department. This enhanced oversight now extends to the booking of larger campus spaces as well, in an effort to carefully manage the suitability of event locations. Furthermore, the Clubs and Associations' department implemented new guidelines around the use of social media for all clubs.

In the days following the event, representatives of the Students' Union met with the leaders of Laurier LifeLink. The concerns expressed by Laurier community members were discussed and clear expectations were set for any future events. It is my commitment to ensure all Laurier students can pursue their education in an environment, which encourages intellectual and social inquiry, while also valuing the existence of a variety of viewpoints and opinions.

Should you have further questions or comments regarding this matter, please fill out our Customer Satisfaction Feedback Form.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tyler Van Herzele". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tyler" and last name "Van Herzele" clearly distinguishable.

Tyler Van Herzele
Students' Union President & CEO